

NSC BRIEFING

29 May 1956

BACKGROUND--ITALIAN ELECTION

1. The Italian election of 27-28 May was the first nation-wide balloting since the parliamentary elections of June 1953.

a. Although nation-wide in scope, the election was local in nature. The electorate voted twice: first for 132,974 seats on Italy's 7,141 communal councils and second for 2,358 seats on 79 provincial councils.

(1) The newly-elected communal councils, in turn, will elect mayors and communal cabinets to carry on the important work of municipal administration.

(2) Italy's provincial councils, in contrast, have only nominal responsibilities.

b. In communes with a population under 10,000--more than 6,000 of the total--the party that wins a plurality receives two-thirds of the council seats. In the provincial elections, two-thirds of the council seats (1,572) are allocated to single-member districts and awarded to the top runner; the remaining third are elected in the province at large by proportional representation.

2. Under a new electoral law forced on the CD by the minor central parties earlier this year, proportional representation will be used in the 737 communes with a population of over 10,000; slightly over half the electorate lives in these 737 towns and cities.

a. Since the new law did away with the automatic majorities produced under the former system, one-party majority administration may prove impossible in many of the larger cities.

b. The Christian Democratic party has already announced that, in the absence of a commune majority, it will form coalitions only with the three small center parties with which it is allied nationally. If this rule is adhered to, many municipalities (Rome, Venice and Milan may be among them) will then either be administered by minority governments or by commissioners appointed by the provincial prefects who are themselves Central Government appointees.

3. Although the response to the campaign had seemed generally apathetic, voter turnout has set a record high: some 91% of the electorate went to the polls--more than 27,500,000 individuals.